

Interpretation and Representation of Violence and Power in Suzanne Collins'
The Hunger Games

Research Thesis

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In 2008, *The Hunger Games* took the world of young adult literature by storm as author Suzanne Collins invited readers to imagine a dystopian North America where children are forced to fight to the death. *The Hunger Games* tells the story of a future post-apocalyptic United States, now called Panem, which has been divided into twelve districts. Katniss Everdeen lives with her mother and eleven-year-old sister, Prim, in what was once the Appalachian Mountains and is now District 12. She saves Prim from the Hunger Games, a televised fight to the death among twenty-four children, by taking Prim's place as a "tribute," or contestant. The male tribute from her district is Peeta Mellark, the baker's son who acts first as Katniss's friend, enemy, and love interest to propel the violent story through the Games. In the process, Katniss, with the help of Peeta and mentor Haymitch Abernathy, start a revolution against the Capitol of Panem. Within the novel, violence is presented through multiple perspectives as a form of punishment, a reminder of forced obedience, a general fascination with death with a variety of meanings, and a pleasure for the public, tributes, and Capitol citizens.

Throughout the novel, Collins relies on words to create scenes and images in readers' heads that will manipulate their emotions and offer various perspectives and sometimes contradictory thoughts from the participants in the Games as the novel progresses. The readers see Katniss as the protagonist and the enemy tributes as the immediate antagonists, but the Capitol, specifically the people involved in making the Games possible as well as the president of Panem, is the real antagonist to fight against. Katniss appears to struggle with this idea, as she is too preoccupied by the other tributes and the problem of how to handle them in the arena. That is, until the end of the Games, when it is announced that only one tribute instead of a pair from the same district can come out alive. In this moment, Katniss realizes that the Capitol, not her rival tributes, is the true enemy to fight as she realizes that "Without a victor, the whole thing

would blow up in the Gamemakers' faces. They'd have failed the Capitol. Might even be executed, slowly and painfully while the cameras broadcast it to every screen in the country" (Collins 344). With a determination to make a stand against the Capitol, Katniss and Peeta nearly eat a handful of poisonous berries. Unlike District 12, some of the wealthier districts see the Games as a way to honor and serve the Capitol, even illegally training their youth to be the strongest tributes. These districts consider the Games a way to prove their worth to the Capitol and show that they are willing to die for their country. The tributes from the wealthy districts do not suffer as many do and are less likely to go against the Capitol. These districts see the Games as less of a punishment and more as a way to prove their worth to the Capitol and continue receiving the best treatment. The closer a district is geographically to the Capitol, the wealthier they tend to be. District 12 is on the outskirts, the poorest of the districts. The outer districts have more kinds of violence to face as their district may be filled with disease and starvation in addition to the violence the tributes face in the Games. It is not only in the Games that readers see how the citizens of Panem react to violence.

Readers are exposed to the characters' reactions to violence in a memory that Katniss has before the Games start. One day while hunting in the woods, before she is a participant in the actual Games, Katniss has the option to save a girl from falling victim to the Capitol. While training for the Games, the girl Katniss could have saved acts as servant to her and Katniss apologizes for her rude actions at a dinner, "But I know that my apology runs much deeper. That I'm ashamed I never tried to help her in the woods" (Collins 85). When faced with the decision to help the girl or let her be abducted, Katniss chooses the latter. Instead of taking the opportunity to stand up for the girl and make a stand against the Capitol, Katniss decides to be a viewer of the action, similar to the viewers of the Games. Katniss's apology is sincere and carries more

weight than just apologizing for dinner behavior. Her apology reflects her feelings on her passivity from years before. Her passivity from that day haunts her in her time in the Capitol when training for the Games.

Katniss's apology to the Avox girl allows her to reflect on the memory with a new perspective as she has gone from a passive participant in an abduction in the woods to an active participant in the Games. Though she is not a participant in the Games when she first sees the girl, she is a participant in Panem and so, just as with any other Capitol viewer, she does nothing to stop the death and torture of a boy and girl who are similar in age to herself. She feels guilty and partially responsible for their fates, but at the time did not put herself in a position to help them. Though she does not necessarily feel the responsibility to take action at the time, at the time of seeing the girl again, she feels responsible for their fates and Katniss and the girl both know that Katniss is the one who let the Capitol abduct her, "You don't forget the face of the person who was your last hope" (Collins 85). When faced with the image of the girl at dinner and again in her room, Katniss feels the weight of her decision. Now that the girl is a symbol of the Capitol and what they do to people, Katniss realizes the role she had in this girl's life and that now their relationship runs much deeper than a day that Katniss suppressed from her memory. On that day hunting in the woods, she embraces passivity. But now, Katniss must face her passivity with regard to the girl and the other tributes that will soon be trying to kill her. Unlike Katniss, readers have no way of addressing their passive role in the novel. Readers act as a different kind of audience, one where they can have no say in what happens. Even though they feel guilty that nearly two-dozen children are brutally killed, they are unable to take action in the events. They are not directly responsible for the deaths of the characters, but they are enabling a fictional world where murder as a sport is embraced and celebrated. The readers, like characters

in the novel, are being manipulated in order to feel guilty for the deaths. Readers are unique because they mirror Katniss's passivity during the abduction and read the novel for entertainment, similar to how the Capitol views the Games, but they are able to see both the tributes' and the Capitol's involvement in the Games.

After apologizing, Katniss reflects on her reaction to watching the girl be abducted by the Capitol while readers watch her without the involvement of the Capitol or the Games. Katniss knows that this event, though not actually a part of the Games, still influences the relationship between the Capitol, the Games, tributes, and audience. She recognizes how her passivity in that event is similar to how citizens of Panem watch the Games, "That I let the Capitol kill the boy and mutilate her without lifting a finger. Just like I was watching the Games" (Collins 85). When faced with this opportunity to take part in a scene that mirrors the Games, including the Capitol's involvement, the inability to rebel against the Capitol, and hiding and fighting for your own life, Katniss does not act like the victor she will become. Instead, she acts as Capitol citizen, watching instead of taking part in the action. Katniss is a part of the audience here, she is part of the drama in a larger sense, but she is not actually taking part in the action. Because she is not part of the action, she can essentially deny her involvement in this scene. Audience members in the Capitol can deny their involvement in the Games because they are not actively participating, even though they encourage, embrace, and are excited watching the action. Both the stage of the abduction and the stage of the Games are there for the readers as audience members. As she goes to bed, Katniss wonders at the girl's reaction to Katniss's own possible death, "I wonder if she'll enjoy watching me die" (Collins 85). Here, Katniss acknowledges that their roles are now switched, but the girl has motivation to take pleasure in watching Katniss's pain and has no opportunity to save Katniss even if she wanted to. Instead of being alone in the woods, the whole country will

watch Katniss fight for her life, just as Katniss watched the girl fight for her life alone in the woods. The initial interaction between Katniss and the girl sets up an important aspect in Katniss's life because it is in that moment where Katniss acts as a Capitol citizen and sets up the reversal of that role as the servant girl will now watch the deaths in the arena.

After seeing the Avox girl in the Capitol for the first time, Katniss must refocus herself into the mindset of a tribute in the Games, a participant in the Capitol's torture for its districts and the pleasure the citizens feel watching murders. The tributes receive first-class treatment before an inevitable death for all but one of them. After winning, the victor will never have to face hunger again and will be provided new housing within their district. The first-class treatment can often distract tributes and the promise of food and fame is tempting enough for many to want to participate in the Games and fight to win. Initially, seeing the Avox girl reminds Katniss of the reality of the Games. Katniss, after getting caught up in the same thing the Capitol citizens are interested in, realizes that "the idea of the girl with her maimed tongue frightens me. She has reminded me why I'm here. Not to model flashy costumes and eat delicacies. But to die a bloody death while the crowds urge on my killer" (Collins 80). The fantasy of the food and costumes will overshadow that dark reality of the Games if tributes allow it. Katniss refuses to be distracted by it. The Games have shifted from being post-rebellion district punishment almost seventy-five years ago to a Capitol entertainment source at the expense of selected tributes. Initially, the Games were put in place to show the districts that the Capitol held the power in the country. For modern Capitol citizens, it has transformed into the ultimate form of reality television. Former arenas are preserved as historic sites, but they are not necessarily used as a way to educate Capitol citizens and the people of the districts. Instead, "The arenas are historic sites, preserved after the Games. Popular destinations for residents to visit, to vacation. Go for a

month, rewatch the Games, tour the catacombs, visit the sites where the deaths took place. You can even take part in reenactments” (Collins 144). These “historic sites” can be used as an additional warning to the districts, but they also serve another purpose. The sites show that the Capitol can create more than just a reality television series about the Games. The sites are used as vacation spots for Capitol citizens and demonstrate how the Capitol has created more than just a reality television series. They have built their new culture around the Games, encouraging Capitol residents and district citizens to fully embrace this form of entertainment in every aspect of their lives.

The novel takes into consideration the different perspectives a character can have on violence; especially in the way they view violence. Earlier in her life, Katniss plays the role of Capitol citizen as she watches a girl get abducted in the woods without taking part in the action. While training for the Games, Katniss’s role as a bystander changes. Before, she took the role of Capitol citizen watching a girl who will inevitably be punished by the Capitol. Now, she takes the role of a tribute in training, watching what could very well be an image of her own death. During a training session, Katniss’s role transforms as she watches another tribute “kill” a dummy and standing by frozen with fascination. She watches the fight unfold, imagining that she is the dummy and stands watching an image of her death in a fantasy world. Unable to turn away, Katniss watches the sight of her own possible death. However, it is not entirely a fantasy world for Katniss, nor was it a fantasy world as she watched the girl in the woods. This time though, Katniss is the one facing the likelihood of dying, not a stranger. Katniss is aware that this dummy being mutilated is a representation of what could soon be her own death. She is fascinated while she watches the spear enter the dummy’s heart as if she were an outsider watching an image of her own death, “I’ve been preoccupied with watching the boy from District

2 send a spear through a dummy's heart from fifteen yards" (Collins 95). She watches herself die in a fantasy that could soon become reality, if not for her then for her fellow tributes. If she is not the one getting a spear through her heart, she will be the one throwing the spear. This is the moment Katniss realizes she will have to take an active, not passive, role in the Games. In an active role, Katniss will have to take action in the Games, fighting for her own life while at the same time trying to protect her young ally, Rue, and when they fight together, Peeta. She will fight against the other tributes, even if she does not want to kill them, she knows it is the only way to survive, and survival is not something Katniss gives up on. Her previous passive role as she watched as if she were an audience member and watching the spearing of a dummy involved her simply standing by the sidelines, worried about her own safety in each scene. Being active would allow her to take control of what is happening to her and taking part in the fighting, thus giving her the opportunity to protect herself, Rue, and Peeta.

Before the Games, she is fascinated with seeing these fake death scenes take place and is unable to turn away from them, but, after winning the Games and witnessing the murders of the other tributes, she has no desire to watch them again as a televised program. The idea of reliving the Games is nearly unbearable for Katniss. She struggles with the fact that she is only one of two people who survived the Games, even if she had no previous connection to the victims. Despite her lack of personal relationships with nearly every person in the arena with her, watching the Games a second time as a member of the Capitol society causes her distress. Reliving these scenes, she is isolated from the society she is supposed to belong to because no one else experienced it first hand as she did. She did not want to see them die the first time, "I do not want to watch my twenty-two fellow tributes die. I saw enough of them die the first time" (Collins 362). First, she had to watch them as a participant in the Games, but now she will see

them from the perspective the audience was seeing them. As she watches the events on screen, she recognizes herself and the other tributes, but is unable to make the distinction that the reality of the Games exists and she participates in it, “It’s like watching complete strangers in another Hunger Games” (Collins 363). Once again, her role as a participant has shifted. Instead of watching as dummy is killed by a fellow tribute, she is watching the people she knew in the Games commit murder and seeing them die. She is also seeing the Games as the Capitol and the Districts saw them. In this way, Katniss is seeing the Games as a victor, a Capitol resident, and as a citizen of District 12, both of which are a part of the country of Panem. Even though she is viewing the televised version of the Games as a member of three distinctly different groups, she is entirely alone. She is isolated from the reality of participating in the Games. She is mentally and physically unable to connect these three versions of herself to any of the groups. She is the first to have caused such a drastic change in rules for the Games by finding a way for two tributes to survive and therefore does not fully connect with any group. She survived the Games like the victors, but she did so by outsmarting the Capitol, not by murdering every tribute she came across. When viewing the televised version of the Games, Katniss sees them as a Capitol resident would. Despite seeing the same thing a Capitol resident would see, she cannot view the Games as a Capitol resident would because she has experience what it is like to be in the arena faced with the task of doing the killing, instead of watching it be broadcast on television. She has a first hand experience of the violence that the tributes are exposed to. She sees the tributes as people, not as the source of entertainment and drama that the Capitol residents see them as. Even within her own district, she cannot view the Games as her neighbors do. While they see it as a victory for District 12 and an opening for change and rebellion in the country, Katniss sees the damage she has done and the effect she has had and desperately wants to minimize future

damage that could lead to more death and destruction. As a result, she finds herself separated and struggling to establish her role and who she is now that she has survived the Games.

Katniss's perspective of the Games evolves as she participates in them and while she watches the televised version of the Games after she and Peeta win. Katniss and Peeta watch the televised version as both Capitol residents and citizens of Panem. As the victorious pair watches the screen, Katniss recognizes herself and the other tributes, but is unable to believe that these events happened to her. Katniss views the Games as the citizens of Panem, in the Capitol and the people at home in the districts, watched it, and recognizes that while they are brutal, they were appealing and enjoyable for the Capitol citizens to see. The violence that Katniss experiences in the Games serves as entertainment for the Capitol and she recognizes this. Waiting for the last tribute to die before Katniss and Peeta can be declared winners, Katniss is aware that their suffering is what fuels the energy of the Capitol. Though they were originally made as a punishment for an uprising, the Games now serve both as punishment and entertainment. Katniss and the other tributes are tortured in order to bring pleasure to the citizens of the Capitol:

The cold would be torture enough, but the real nightmare is listening to Cato, moaning, begging, and finally just whimpering as the mutts work away at him. After a very short time, I don't care who he is or what he's done, all I want is for his suffering to end. 'Why don't they just kill him?' I ask Peeta...No viewer could turn away from the show now" (Collins 339).

Katniss acknowledges that in this moment, they are meant as a means of entertainment with the ideological point to show the districts how little power they have over the Capitol. They are not seen as people. After the Games, Katniss recognizes the brutality of them, "Objectively, I can see the mutts and Cato's death are as gruesome as ever, but again, I feel it happens to people I have never met" (Collins 364). Here, Katniss removes herself from the Games entirely and views it as someone in the Capitol, someone who has no connection with any of the tributes and the risk

there is for not just the tribute, but also unaware of the families in the districts waiting to see if their child will come home. Despite acknowledging that it is enjoyable for the Capitol to watch, she feels no connection to the actions or deaths in the Games. The horror of the Games is pleasurable to the viewers and even extends to the tributes, but the end result is death for nearly all participants in the Games whereas the result for the Capitol viewers is the pleasure of watching them fight to the death. The suffering the tributes face in the Games feeds the excitement of the Capitol residents. Within the Capitol, people feel a small connection to the tributes and they act as if they really know the tributes, even though they will watch them die and most likely never see them as anything other than a product of the Games. With a confined connection to the tributes, residents are able to feel passionate about who they want to win while maintaining enough distance between themselves and the tributes to see the Games as part of the culture of the Capitol.

Capitol residents have more sources of pleasure than the districts, usually involving their extravagant lifestyle but also by relying on violence to further feed their pleasure and enjoyment of life. They rely on the deaths of the Hunger Games to give them pleasure in their lives while gorging themselves on food, changing their physical appearance, and socializing at parties. The relationship between Peeta and Katniss intensifies the suffering of the Games as well as the narrative pleasure that readers take part in. Readers and Capitol residents alike are cheering for Katniss and Peeta, though residents believe only one will survive, adding to the suspense of the Games, and readers hope both will leave, deepening the relationship between Katniss, Peeta, and the Capitol by allowing both tributes to live. The couple looks for subtle ways to increase the pleasure the citizens are feeling in order to gain their sympathy and support, while at the same time giving the people in the districts watching a sense of hope for a start of a rebellion, ““Whose

idea was the hand holding?’ ‘Just the perfect touch of rebellion’” (Collins 79). The portrayal of Katniss and Peeta as a team serves to intensify the suffering they will feel in the arena and the pleasure of watching the pair throughout the Games and seeing their relationship develop in front of the Capitol crowd. For a moment during the ceremonies and festive dinner, Katniss is caught up in the thrill of being in the Capitol and seeing how the people live. She is distracted by the glamor of the Capitol and what her life could be like until she sees the girl that she denied helping in the woods and realizes the severity of the situation.

The primary reason for the Games was originally for “punishment for the uprising,” however the unofficial reason to hold an annual Games where twenty-three twelve to eighteen year olds are murdered under the watchful eye of the Capitol and the citizens of Panem is a way to embrace the power the Capitol has over the districts and even its own residents. The Games are considered a sport across the country, “The real sport of the Hunger Games is watching the tributes kill one another” (Collins 177). Using the word “tribute” for participants in the Games suggests that the children in the country are meant to be offered up as payment to the Capitol. In ancient and medieval times, it was common for a powerful state to compel a tributary entity of some sort to surrender children as slaves or sacrifice. By doing this, the powerful state is able to dominate the lesser state into submission. Giving up a child, as parents in Panem do, forces them to acknowledge their own abjection and abasement in the matter. The lesser parties that are involved, in this case the tributes of the Games and the residents of Panem, give up their children without a fight. Giving their children up to a more powerful, foreign entity lets the districts know that the Capitol holds the power and there is nothing the people can do to stop it. The people have been cast off from the society of the Capitol and their children are being used to enforce this. It is well known that the Games serve not only as a punishment, but also now as the

Capitol's primary form of televised entertainment. The yearly ceremonial acknowledgement of power and powerlessness between the Capitol and the districts highlights each party's role in the government system: the districts serve the Capitol. The residents of Panem are humiliated and must acknowledge their abasement by being forced to sacrifice their sons and daughters to the Hunger Games.

The Capitol, as the powerful being in Panem, demands sacrifices of the districts' children primarily to maintain the power they have and mirrors historical human sacrifices. Officially, it is for punishment. This punishment can be viewed as a way to maintain harmony within the society. René Girard argues, "there is a common denominator that determines the efficacy of all sacrifices... This common denominator is internal violence – all the dissensions, rivalries, jealousies, and quarrels within the community that the sacrifices are designed to suppress" (8). The "internal violence" for Panem is the rebellion that gave rise to the Hunger Games. It is also negative feelings the people have towards the Capitol. Because of the internal violence within a society, order and harmony must be restored. This is where a ritualistic sacrifice comes in to play: "The purpose of the sacrifice is to restore harmony to the community, to reinforce the social fabric" (Girard 8). Violence, if left unappeased, will build up until it breaks free from its confinement in the society and interject within the surrounding area. Sacrifice, whether animal or human, is used as a way to manage this violence. For the society in *The Hunger Games*, the violence that the Capitol openly acknowledges is the rebellion that resulted in the supposed destruction of District 13. But there is more internal violence than that. The issues within the districts – starvation, death, disease, poor living conditions, lack of resources – are also a part of the violence that the Capitol attempts to quell.

The human sacrifices made in the novel are no different from the sacrifices that have been made throughout history. Oftentimes, sacrifice has been described as “an act of mediation between a sacrifice and a ‘deity’” (Girard 6), but there is no ‘deity’ within *The Hunger Games*, not even an omniscient narrator. The idea of a deity receiving blood sacrifices, at least in today’s day and age, has little reality. Instead, the Capitol takes the role of ‘deity.’ The sacrificial process also requires a certain degree of misunderstanding (Girard 7). This misunderstanding typically means that the celebrants “do not and must not comprehend the true role of the sacrificial act.” (Girard 7). It is the deity that demands the victims, the deity that savors the smoke from the altars. In this case, the Capitol savors the power it continues to hold over the people and demands that the districts continue to give up their children as victims for sacrifice to hold its power. However, the people in the outer districts understand the role of the sacrificial act and Katniss becomes the person who goes against the sacrificial ritual and refuses to let the Capitol use her as a sacrifice for the country. The system of the Hunger Games involves giving up two individuals, one male and one female, to the government. This sacrifice is an act of violence inflicted on an individual representing the group. Not only are the individuals representing the group, but they are the youngest and presumably most innocent of the people. Panem is a society that reserves an entire category of human beings, twelve to eighteen year olds, for sacrifice. The victims are a substitute for the entire community. Instead of risking the lives of all the people in the district if they were to rebel, two individuals from each district are offered as substitute. A substitution sacrifice “serves to protect the entire community from *its own* violence; it prompts the entire community to choose its victims outside itself” (Girard 8). While the districts themselves are not choosing the specific victim, other children are able to volunteer, just as Katniss did for her sister, giving them an advantage in terms of who might survive the sacrificial ritual that is the

Hunger Games. Victims in the Hunger Games are forced to follow a long tradition of being sacrificed to a higher power in order to keep violence within the country under control until Katniss defies the rules of the Games.

The Games also serve to provide a physical escape from Capitol life in the form of preservation and vacation, “The arenas are historic sites preserved after the Games. Popular destinations for Capitol residents to visit, to vacation. Go for a month, rewatch the Games, tour the catacombs, visit the sites where the deaths took place. You can even take part in reenactments” (Collins 144-5). Instead of providing resources for their starving and dying citizens in the districts, the Capitol opts to cater primarily to the people living in the city by giving them the opportunity to vacation and take further advantage of the entertaining horror of the Games. Even after the annual Games are over, the Capitol encourages its citizens to continue the pathological obsession they have of the Games by creating a historical vacation destination that makes the Games appear less traumatizing and more fictionalized, even in a fiction novel. The complicated pleasure residents get from the Games leads them to be obsessed with wanting more all the time, even when the Games are not officially happening. Readers of the trilogy also feel a complicated pleasure as they witness the events of the novel. They read about the violence in the novel and still yearn for more as they go on. As outside spectators, the Games have no direct effect on them, just like the Games have no direct effects on the Capitol citizens. Both the readers and citizens watch from the outside as the violence unfolds. However, the Capitol only has a relationship with the tributes and other characters within the novel. Readers on the other hand watch as the Capitol citizens take pleasure in encouraging the events and as the tributes, specifically Katniss, fight for their lives.

Katniss's position in the Games as a tribute inside the arena of the Games and the readers' and Capitol citizens' position as viewers outside the arena cause there to be a divide between the two, even though the novel is told through Katniss as a first-person narration. Katniss is an Other in the novel, "a sub-human object of entertainment to audiences both inside and outside of the texts" (Garriot 103). Cameras are ubiquitous in the arena, relying certain aspects of the Games and the tributes' daily lives to the Capitol audience for entertainment and the district audience as a reminder of what the government can do to their children. However, Katniss's narrative gives readers an even closer, more voyeuristic look at the action. Still, the readers' have a perspective that is a safe distance away from the heart of the action and allows them to identify with Katniss as an Other through her close first-person narrative. It is the general rule of young adult literature that readers identify with the focal character, in the case of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss (Garriot 106). But readers also identify with secondary characters, Peeta, Prim, Gale, Cinna and Effie Trinket. Readers identify with Katniss because of her nobility and heroism as she volunteers for her sister, but she is not the only noble and self-sacrificing character in the novel, allowing readers to identify with multiple characters. Collins' portrayal of the named Capitol residents, such as Cinna and Effie, encourage readers to identify and understand those characters as well, even as readers view them through Katniss's eyes. Within the novel, both Katniss and her team of Capitol residents "view each other as Others" but "this does not mean that the way they Other is the same: Katniss is a depersonalized object...whereas to Katniss the stylists are too alien to relate to, but still living beings rather than objects" (Garriot 108). The support team's views have been formed through the Capitol culture, a culture that is an array of extreme brutality that encourages its people disassociate with the district residents so much that the residents are viewed as subhuman and their death is celebrated. Katniss, as a

district resident, also confirms the idea that out-groups are subhuman in the way she refers to her team as “an affectionate trio of pets” (Collins 353). She also views the other group as subhuman and confirms that her team is not capable of the full range of human emotions, such as empathy. After all, when Katniss survives the Games, the team is happy to see her, but everything about the Games reflects on what they were doing at the time and refocus the Games back on themselves, even though Katniss watched as others were brutally killed and she barely survived. Readers, seeing both Katniss and Capitol citizens, are able to identify with both Others, while essentially being an Other themselves.

As humans, we begin our lives looking at everything and taking in as much as we can, but as we grow we are taught to cover our eyes, first covering them while peering through our fingers, and finally covering them completely. The people in the Capitol and the readers of *The Hunger Games* are both voyeurs, taking in the scenes of the Games without covering their eyes. By doing so, “we then become intimately involved, emboldened, and embodied in and with the moment we see, the gaze’s undoing. At this point ethical possibilities exist, for once we see and are seen, we take the stage, and ethical performance beings” (Grønstad 3). Characters and readers in and of the novel are not seen, though. Instead, they watch the action. They still take the stage and experience an ethical performance, but they must do so without being seen by Katniss and the other tributes. The voyeur “gives perspective, values implications, and then chooses to act or not act” (Grønstad 5). The question is not if the readers and the Capitol audience sees the Games, because they do, but rather it is a question of how they react to the Games. The Capitol audience watches and takes pleasure from the Games without thinking about taking action against the horror of children murdering each other. Readers on the other hand, are unable to do anything about the action and are only able to watch it as it happens and think about

what they would do if they could. As voyeurs, readers are “see-ers,” and in being one, it is suggested that they are removed from the experience, that they are a passive observer and are nothing more than emotionally involved with what they see (Grønstad 5). In order to get the image, or in this case the novel, to look back, readers must think about what the characters in the novel see (Grønstad 7). This gives them a more empathetic connection to the characters in the novel and allows them to become not only an observer, but a more active participant in what they are reading.

In order to provide quality entertainment for the citizens and ensure that the Games run smoothly and there is enough death and violence that the Capitol sees as appropriate, despite the starvation and disease in the districts, the Capitol interferes during and after the Games in order to ensure they run smoothly and that the citizens watching are constantly entertained. The creators and even tributes work to make sure the country is taking pleasure in their performance. The deaths must be harsh and involve elements of surprise, disbelief, and excitement. The most successful deaths in provoking enjoyment include ones of sacrifice or a compelling alliance between tributes, blood and gore, the pain of murdering another person, or a new obstacle an individual tribute faces. Slow deaths, such as freezing in one particular Games, are not popular, “It was considered very anticlimactic in the Capitol, all those quiet, bloodless deaths” (Collins 39). The Capitol wants to draw out the excitement, but if the tributes are not interacting and fighting one another, the audience gets bored and loses interest. There is no pleasure in watching deaths that are not heroic and do not evoke some sort of emotion from the audience. The Gamemakers work to create situations within the arena to create violence that will allow the citizens to take pleasure in watching the Games. They draw out tributes with deadly tricks and lure them into an area to fight, but it is the Capitol’s decision when and where the final fights

will occur and even how they die, “They’re guaranteed a bloody fight to the death with nothing to block their view” (Collins 327). The Capitol is dedicated to making sure that its citizens take as much pleasure from the show as they can. During fights and throughout the Games, the presence of the Capitol and its citizens are always present. Blame is consistently put on the Capitol for putting the tributes in Games and forcing them to fight. It is the Capitol that puts tributes in these fights or the weapon, and not the person, that completes the act of killing.

Without an audience, the Hunger Games would not exist, and the Gamemakers are constantly working to make sure that there is an audience in the Capitol watching the Games and that the people in the districts have something to watch as well. As a result, readers of the novels are entertained by the spectacle of the Games. The Hunger Games has transformed to be audience-involved, with tributes relying on sponsors for outside help for a special edge in the Games. Survival in the Games depends on a tribute’s ability to gain the supports of a sponsor and the favor of audience members. Likewise, reality television shows in today’s world also rely on the audience’s involvement. The Capitol audience watching the Games and the audience watching reality television are both viewing their shows from a safe distance: “insulated by their own apathy and far from any ‘real’ danger or consequences” (Pharr 159). Audiences relish the ruin and humiliation, unpredictability, and the spectacle that unfolds in the life of the tributes and the television stars. Through viewing the Games and the reality television, audiences ensure that the entertainment will go on, exactly what they were designed to do. In the Games, both the viewer and the viewed play a role in continuing the Games. The victims being watched need to provide entertain and action to the audience. A lack of action triggers mechanical traps in order to draw action out of the tributes. The viewer must continue watching and participating in the event by sponsoring the tributes and celebrating the deaths of the Games. Author of *The Hunger*

Games Suzanne Collins describes the Games as “a reality television program,” an “extreme one, but that’s what it is” (Hudson). Collins uses this futuristic setting of the Games to draw attention to issues in today’s society, such as the “vast discrepancy of wealth, the power of television and how it’s used to influence our lives, the possibility that the government could use hunger as a weapon, and then first and foremost to me, the issue of war” (Hudson). Readers and Capitol viewers of the Hunger Games both take pleasure from the Games while watching them from a distance that does not involve being directly involved in the action, but still playing a role in keeping the Games alive. The primary function of the Games is to remind the districts that the Capitol is all-powerful and to deter them from rebelling and without an audience, there would be no need for the Games.

Even though killing and death is a major theme in *The Hunger Games*, there is a distinction in the novel between what kind of death is acceptable. Death that reflects the Capitol’s inability to provide for the districts is unmentionable. Katniss loses her father and she must take over as caretaker of her family after her mother goes into an extreme depression. The Capitol provides a small amount of money, but not for long and not enough to sustain a family of three. Katniss and her family, like many others in her district, suffer from lack of care from the Capitol, “But the money ran out and we were slowly starving to death” (Collins 27). The Capitol does not acknowledge how their citizens in outer districts suffer and the people are forced to come up with their own remedies for illness and pain and commit illegal activities such as hunting and black market trading in order to survive. There is no concern on the Capitol’s behalf that their citizens are living in horrible conditions. Especially in District 12, Katniss’ home, “Starvation is never the cause of death officially. It’s always the flu, or exposure, or pneumonia. But that fools no one” (Collins 28). Death in the Games is seen as honorable to Capitol citizens

as well as in districts that get proper food and care. But in District 12, the Games are just a quicker death sentence. In District 12 it is obvious that the people, especially those unable to provide for themselves, do not receive proper help and have no way of taking care of themselves. The Capitol refuses to acknowledge the true cause of death, showing a new side of passivity in death. This side puts the blame on natural causes when it is the Capitol's neglect and refusal to care for their districts. In the arena, tributes come together and are excited about killing each other in order to win, "I know it's a girl now. I can tell by the pleading, the agonized scream that follows. Then there's laughter and congratulations from several voices. Someone cries out, 'Twelve down and eleven to go!' which gets a round of appreciative hoots" (Collins 159). The Capitol allows these murders to happen, celebrates them even, glorifying the fact that children are killing each other. They are excited to kill each other because of the promise of fame, fortune, and food. The murdered girl in this scene suffers briefly, and even in this short amount of time, the other tributes are excited and ready to face the remaining tributes in a life or death fight, knowing that if they can beat them, they will receive the pleasure and benefits from the Capitol, just as the Capitol receives pleasure from the suffering of the victims in the Games.

Food is used as a weapon to keep the districts relying on the Capitol and demonstrate the power that the Capitol has over the districts. It is rationed and granted to the victors of the Games and the people living in the Capitol. The people in the Capitol have so much to eat that they overeat and purge themselves, only to continue eating. Most people in the Districts do not have enough to eat while the people in the Capitol are deliberately starving and/or gorging themselves (Gresh 33). Oftentimes, the children in the districts will put their name in the reaping for the Games more times in order to receive tessera, a meager amount of grain and oil for one person a year (Gresh 46). By entering multiple times, children increase their chances of being selected for

the Games, giving the Capitol more power of them. According to Katniss, the Capitol uses the tessera to “plant hatred between the starving workers of the Seam and those who can generally count on supper and thereby ensure we will never trust one another” (Collins 14). Even within District 12, there are people who have more to eat than others, leading to conflict within the community and a black market for trade. The lottery-like system of the districts and the Capitol’s desire to create a distinction between the lower class and those who might go against the government and the upper class that is similar to the allotment of grain in ancient Rome. In Rome’s case, a lottery was not held, but officials gave out grain to people from the Temple of Ceres, goddess of the harvest, once a month (Gresh 46-7). The term “Bread and Circuses,” (*Panem et Circenses*) in ancient Rome referred to the free grain dole and the gladiatorial games (Gresh 47). In the world of *The Hunger Games*, the “bread” would also refer to the grain given in exchange for a higher risk in the reaping addition to providing the name for the future country, Panem. The “circuses” would refer to the Games themselves, which every person in the country would see. Much of the ancient world suffered starvation and extreme hunger, as do the characters in *The Hunger Games* and even people today as they struggle to provide sufficient food for their family.

There is a distinction between how the characters view the difference between hunting animals and hunting the people in the Games, demonstrated by Katniss and best friend Gale during their last conversation before the Games. Gale reassures Katniss that she is a hunter and there is no difference between hunting animals in the woods and hunting people in the Games. Katniss, on the other hand, first argues that they are more than just defenseless animals. Gale faces the facts immediately. He knows Katniss must lay aside her morals about killing humans and accept that the Hunger Games will involve killing:

“Katniss, it’s just hunting. You’re the best hunter I know,” says Gale.

“It’s not just hunting. They’re armed. They think,” I say.

“So do you. And you’ve had more practice. Real practice,” he says. “You know how to kill.”

“Not people,” I say.

“How different can it be, really?” says Gale grimly.

The awful thing is that if I can forget they’re people, it will be no different at all. (Collins 40)

Again, Katniss thinks about the future and reality of the Games and sees herself in it. She acknowledges that it is awful, but also notes that this is something she can overcome. She knows that the reality will go from hunting animals to hunting humans. This conversation opens a lurid pleasure for the reader. The idea of hunting animals being the same as hunting humans is unpleasantly harsh and gives readers an unnatural effect of seeing humans and animals as moral equals. Readers are watching Katniss as she sees her future and the citizens of Panem will watch Katniss as she kills humans. Katniss participates in murder and even though doing so is a ritualized occurrence in Panem, it gives readers a sense of unease because in their world, mass murder enforced by the government and carried out by children is taboo. By watching Katniss and the participants in the Games participate the Capitol gets a positive sense of pleasure at the expense of the victims. Katniss gets a negative pleasure. She must kill, but in return she will be able to live. Katniss kills animals regularly in the woods in District 12 in order to survive. Gale is right; killing the other tributes should hypothetically be no different from killing animals for food. In both situations Katniss needs to survive and the means of doing so is the same. She is a huntress at heart and feels safest surrounded by the trees: “It is a place where she can survive” (Oliver 128). Katniss constantly feels pulled back into the woods where she can hunt to provide for her family. Even after winning, Katniss yearns to hunt and even works hunting rights into negotiations later in the trilogy, where she provides people other than her family with food

(Oliver 127). Readers see both the positive and negative pleasure in the way that they get pleasure from reading the story and in seeing how the Capitol and Katniss react to the Games.

Gale asserts that hunting animals is really no different than hunting people, after all, Katniss is killing both as a means of survival. Similarly, in terms of sacrifice, differentiating between human and animal victims serves little purpose. In this society, a select group of individuals is being reserved for sacrificial purposes in order to protect another category: the survival of the country as a whole. While there is morally a gap between animal and human sacrifices, this gap should not prevent people from noticing the similarities they share:

Strictly speaking, there is no essential difference between animal sacrifice and human sacrifice...Our tendency to insist on difference that have little reality when discussing the institution of sacrifice – our reluctance, for example, to equate animal with human sacrifice – is undoubtedly a factor in the extraordinary misunderstandings that still persist in that area of human culture. (Girard 10)

Dividing animal and human sacrifice has, in a strictly ritualistic sense, sacrificial character. The division is based on a value judgment. That is, the preconception that one category of victim (a human being) is unsuitable for sacrificial purposes, while the other category (the animal) is sacrificeable. It is necessary in sacrifice that “all victims, even the animal ones, bear a certain resemblance to the object they replace” (Girard 11). Either victim, animal or human, must bear a sharp resemblance to the “human categories excluded from the ranks of the ‘sacrificeable,’ while maintaining a degree of difference that forbids all possible confusion” (Girard 12). It is interesting to note that Katniss becomes a symbol of the revolution by embracing her predatory qualities. She is portrayed as the “Mockingjay,” and while this fictional bird is not a bird of prey, Katniss is similar to one: “She is identified with an animal...and like a bird of prey, she craves the hunt and the kill” (Oliver 127). In the Hunger Games, the children must go through this sacrificial rite, if not the Games then at least the reaping of names to decide the tributes, in order

to reach adulthood. The Games act as an initiation of sorts and allows the children to grow into adulthood. The government of Panem decided to use children as sacrifice for the country, thus fulfilling the function of sacrifice “to quell violence within the community and to prevent conflicts from erupting” (Girard 14). While this appears to be effective, at least until Katniss enters the Games, our society has no practices of sacrificial rites and seems to get along without them. Violence exists in our society, there is no denying that, but it is not threatened with extinction. It is the judicial system, which serves to deflect the menace of vengeance that people seek, that keeps our society from relying on sacrificial rites. The system does not suppress vengeance, but rather limits it to a single act of reprisal.

Death is a form of sacrifice, but the novel addresses sacrifice on many levels. The Hunger Games involves sacrificing children from the districts, but the Games are a result of a revolt that occurred where the Capitol seemingly destroyed one district, District 13, as a sacrifice to preserve the rest of the districts. The Capitol makes an example of District 13 and sacrifices children in the remaining districts as punishment, allowing them volunteer to the place of a tribute (as Katniss does for her sister, Prim). Peeta also volunteers to let Katniss win and go home, but she refuses. Instead, the pair decides to make a sacrifice themselves by eating poisonous berries to show the Capitol that they can die on their own terms, as much as the Games allows that. Before they are able to swallow the berries, it is announced that both of them have won and become victors of the 74th annual Hunger Games. The Games and events leading up to the Games, such as the reaping of tributes, demonstrate the different deaths that can be perceived as sacrifice. The Hunger Games come from a rebellion where the Capitol demolished one of the districts. This demolishing of a district and what comes from it serve as punishment. The Capitol punishes District 13 by removing them from Panem and it punishes what is left of

Panem by creating a constant reminder of the sacrifice they made to preserve Panem. By sacrificing a district, they are able to maintain power and control over Panem, including controlling how the districts make their own sacrifice to the Capitol. The Capitol uses the Games as punishment:

Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch – this is the Capitol’s way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion. Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. ‘Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there’s nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen.’ (Collins 18-19)

The Capitol uses the Games as a reminder that it is the one in control, it can change sacrifice from something honorable to something that gives it a sense of power, leaving the people hopeless with no alternative other than submission.

In order to further the control the government has over the districts, they control what happens in the Games and influence Panem residents’ physical attributes and their mental and emotional health. There are no rules in the Games as long as the audience is entertained by the deaths. However, there is one thing that the Capitol does not allow in the Games: “There are no rules in the arena, but cannibalism doesn’t play well with the Capitol audience, so they tried to head it off” (Collins 143). The Gamemakers control the Games in order to prevent this and manipulates tributes’ actions and their encounters with other tributes and any “muttations” (Collins 42). They rely on the Games to control the people, but the Capitol also relies on food to control the people and form a bond between the people in order to deter rebellion. Blood connects a family, but “the blood that binds the citizens of Panem is the bloodshed of human sacrifice, witnessed collectively” (Parks 138). The government connects the residents of the districts and the citizens of the Capitol, but the Capitol uses food to create a distance between the Capitol, the districts, and the people within the districts. The people in the Capitol have no worry

about where their next meal is coming from; in fact, they make themselves sick so they can enjoy every part of it. District residents on the other hand struggle for survival and oftentimes do not have a reliable food source, even with the Capitol's supposed protection over them. The Hunger Games "provides a focus for the masses, tributes to root for, a sense of collective in that every district has stakes in this game and the spectacle of a sporting or special event" (Parks 141).

There is an attempt to appease the people and the "discontent through the provision of the means of life and recreation" (Parks 141). This attempt reflects the influence of ancient Rome and the *Panem et Circenses* from which Collins got the name of the fictional country. Maintaining power over something or someone is not just the physical control over them, it also involves the mental and emotional persuasion. The Hunger Games acts as a public display of torture, physically, mentally, and emotionally, that reinforces President Coriolanus Snow's right to rule and the ability to crush any resistance.

Katniss's most notable sacrifice for her family is a sacrifice that is different from the Capitol using sacrifice as punishment. Instead, Katniss volunteers to take the place of her sister in the Games in order to save her. Here, sacrifice is honorable and puts someone else first. It redirects the danger and inevitability of death on Katniss instead of her sister

'Prim!' The strangled cry comes out of my throat, and my muscles begin to move again. 'Prim!' I don't need to shove through the crowd. The other kids make way immediately allowing me a straight path to the stage. I reach her just as she is about to mount the steps. With one sweep of my arm, I push her behind me. 'I volunteer!' I gasp. 'I volunteer as tribute!' (Collins 22)

Katniss does not think about how the Capitol is punishing her in this moment. She only thinks about her sister and the importance of saving her. Katniss is not just making a sacrifice for her sister though. She is taking the place as tribute, so that no other girl in District 12 will be selected. Her sacrifice to her community comes second to her family. Katniss's sacrifice will

become her most marketable quality throughout her struggles in the Games. Effie Trinket, District 12 escort, says “But I’ve done my best with what I had to work with. How Katniss sacrificed herself for her sister” (Collins 74). The sacrifice she makes gives Katniss a way to play to the sympathy of the Capitol and its citizens. Her sacrifice in the Capitol is not seen as protection, it is seen as a way to gain sponsors in order to win the Games. A sacrifice like Katniss’s is not viewed the same in the Capitol as it is in District 12. In the Capitol, it is a way to sell herself in order to win sponsors, in District 12 it is a way to protect her sister and offer herself up the bigger sacrifice of the Hunger Games.

But her killing in the Games does not violate the taboo of death. For the tributes, death in the Games is essential and even gives some of the tributes of sense of pleasure, excitement, or sense of purpose. Katniss is already a hunter, theoretically giving her an edge to killing in the Games. Hunting for food and killing the other tributes are both necessary means for survival, just in different contexts. Death from illness in the districts may be a taboo that the Capitol refuses to acknowledge does not affect the fact that the Capitol requires the people in the districts to kill to survive. Even though Peeta wants to preserve his morals and prove that he will not die as just a sacrifice to the Capitol, he nonetheless concedes, “No, when the time comes, I’m sure I’ll kill just like everybody else” (Collins 42). Peeta realizes that killing is an inescapable part of the Games. Katniss knows that murder is a part of the Games, but unlike Peeta who sees it as a moral struggle, Katniss asserts that “I will not end up with the unpleasant task of killing him” (Collins 153), in reference to killing Peeta. At the start of the Games, Katniss views killing as an “unpleasant task” that simply must be done. There is no escaping this fact. She treats the Games as something she just has to survive, despite the fact that by the end it puts her views of unnamed tributes and victims who are conscious and who have a conscience in perspective. Many times,

in order to win the Games, the tributes will form alliances in order to take out as many people as they can before turning on each other. Katniss learns another group of tributes are “fighting in a pack. I’m not really surprised. Often alliances are formed in the early stages of the Games” (Collins 159). These alliances are formed, not because the tributes have any connections to each other, but because they can work together to eliminate as many other tributes as possible in order to bring themselves closer to winning the Games before they face the inevitability of killing each other.

Author Suzanne Collins creates a world within her novel that forces readers to acknowledge the manipulation of the Capitol and how the Capitol uses violence to control the citizens. Readers are exposed to this violence through Katniss’s thoughts and memories. In *The Hunger Games*, the enemy is the Capitol and the society it has created that forces children to fight to the death. Katniss however, initially believes her enemies to be her fellow tributes. The Capitol portrays the tributes as enemies and forces them together to fight so that the Capitol can remain in control of the districts and its people. The Hunger Games were established as a way to punish the districts and remind them of the horrors of war after the rebellion of District 13. For some districts, the Games are a way for them to attempt to be closer and more like the Capitol. Some youth in the districts, determined to show their loyalty to the Capitol, want to participate in the Games. For other districts, it is another way for their children to die, in addition to the famine and disease they already suffer. The Capitol uses violence as a threat to subdue the districts. Katniss witnesses the violence of the Games, but she also sees the violence behind the scenes when she is the only person in the woods who watches as a boy and girl who are of similar age to Katniss are killed and abducted. Katniss’s reaction to witnessing this act of violence is to stand by and not act. In this setting, Katniss acts as a passive viewer of the action, just as the Capitol

citizens watch the Games. Katniss must revisit her passivity from that day during her time in the Capitol when she comes face-to-face with the girl from the woods. Readers are passive, but they have no choice in being so. Katniss chose her actions. Readers are never able to address their passivity, but Katniss is and she does when she apologizes to the girl. By facing her passivity, Katniss prepares for her soon-to-be active role in the Games. Readers are unable to face their passivity so directly, but, like Katniss, they still feel a responsibility for the deaths in the Games.

Katniss's view on violence changes throughout the novel, which in turn changes readers' perspective on violence because of the first-person narration and connection readers feel towards Katniss. Previously, Katniss acted as a Capitol citizen, watching the action from afar. After volunteering for the Games, she has to take on the role of tribute, participating in the violence and even preparing to kill other tributes. During training, she is fascinated by death and the possibility of it as she watches tributes prepare for the Games. She considers the sight of her own possible death as a tribute strikes a dummy and imagines it happening in a fantasy world. But this is not a fantasy world, it is her reality and soon she will be facing the very real possibility that she could be killed. Her passive role morphs to an active role. After winning the Games, Katniss is unwilling to rewatch the Games and see the others die onscreen. After winning, she must watch a televised version of the Games and struggles with making a distinction between the realities of the Games and seeing them again on television. During this viewing of the Games, she is isolated from the reality of participating in the Games as well as mentally and physically unable to connect herself to any version, Capitol resident, District 12 citizen, or victor, of herself. Because she sees the Games in terms of the statement she has made against the Capitol, she does not want to see her actions as an act of rebellion.

The Hunger Games were originally meant as punishment, but have since transformed to a source of entertainment and a way to further control the districts and people. The Games are used as a source of entertainment for Capitol citizens. They take pleasure in the tributes pain and suffering. The sport of the Games is watching the tributes kill one another. Extending beyond the Games, Capitol citizens enjoy the Games year round by visiting the arenas as historic sites on vacation. Katniss knows she is being used by the Capitol to keep the citizens happy, but she also knows that she is being used to show the Capitol's immense control over the districts. The pleasure extends to the tributes; especially those who wanted to enter the Games to prove their worth to the Capitol. Death within the Games means another tribute's survival. The Capitol's use of the word "tribute" only adds to their sense of power over the districts. "Tribute" suggests that the children are meant to be offered by the districts as payment to the Capitol and that there is nothing the districts can do to stop this, so long as they want to avoid war. By giving up their children, parents acknowledge their abasement in society. The children are used to enforce the fact that the districts have been cast off from the central society of the Capitol. For Katniss, there is a distinction between killing animals to feed her family and killing the tributes for her own survival, but she must face the tributes if she wants to live. In both situations, hunting for food for survival and killing tributes in the Games, Katniss is killing for survival. The sacrifice of the children, of District 13, and Peeta's attempted sacrifice of dying so Katniss can return home demonstrate the different forms of sacrifice within the novel. The children are sacrificed so that the Capitol can hold the power, District 13 is destroyed for the survival of the country, and Peeta's attempted sacrifice inspires a new rebellion. In the end, the Capitol's attempt to control the districts is overthrown because of Katniss's actions in the Games. The Capitol attempts to maintain control by manipulating the people and their actions while Capitol citizens continue to

take pleasure from the Games, but Katniss and Peeta make a stand against them. The violence inside and outside the Games causes characters to consider their role in society and their changing perspectives while leading Panem to a new revolution.

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